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House weighs tough actions for ignoring school bus lights

BY MATT HELMS
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It could soon be more costly for people who ignore or deliberately drive around school buses with flashing red lights.

A bill introduced recently in the Michigan House would double fines for drivers ticketed for disobeying traffic laws within 20 feet of a school bus that is stopped with its overhead reds flashing.

The legislation also would smack violators with up to a year in prison and \$1,000 in fines if they cause an injury in a school bus zone, and up to 15 years in prison and \$7,500 in fines if a driver causes a death.

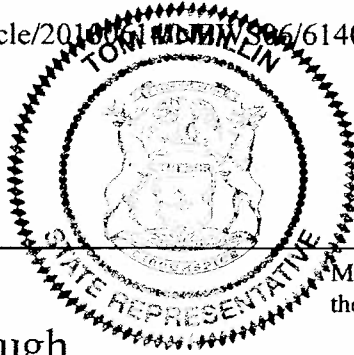
Over the last decade, Michigan lawmakers put stiffer penalties into effect for traffic violations in roadwork zones and in school zones.

Siobhan Riffle, a Plymouth-Canton Community Schools bus driver for 15 years, said cars breeze through the flashing reds on her school bus nearly every day, putting students in danger.

"These people in cars have no idea where the kids are heading," said Riffle, chief steward of Operating Engineers Local 324, representing about 130 drivers for the district. "They're really taking a gamble."

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Tom McMillin, R-Rochester Hills, said the enhanced penalties are needed because too many drivers ignore the laws regarding school buses.

"We're elevating this to a serious offense,"



McMillin said. "Many people think that's already the case, but it's not."

A conviction for illegally driving around a school bus currently puts three points on a driver's record and fines of \$250 or more, depending on local court costs. Fines would double under McMillin's bill.

State law says drivers must stop no closer than 20 feet from a bus that is stopped with its overhead red lights flashing, and stay put until the lights go off and it's safe to proceed.

McMillin said he was shocked that a Troy woman received only a ticket and about \$250 in fines after she hit two Avondale High School students last fall when she drove around a stopped bus. The teens suffered broken bones, but recovered.

About 800,000 Michigan students use school buses each year, the Michigan Association for Pupil Transportation says.

Mike Martin, executive director of the National Association for Pupil Transportation, said about half of bus-related student deaths nationwide are caused by other motorists.

Contact **MATT HELMS**: 313-222-1450 or mhelms@freepress.com.

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The advertisement features a black and white photo of a young girl wearing a tiara and a necklace, looking towards the camera. To the right of the photo, the text reads: "Mom Dilemma #36: Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?". Below this text are two buttons: "YES, at least she's dressed!" and "NO, I have some rules!". At the bottom right, the logo "momslime.com" is visible with the tagline "where moms think smart".

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